



GREEN FESTIVAL: RIVER MEMORIES

A PIECE TO OPEN THE FESTIVAL ON 12TH OCTOBER 2024

SCRIPT

PERFORMERS: Sue B; Heather; Stewart; Gill; Jeff; Barbara; Clare; Sue S; Eva; Saffie; Jane

All except Tony waiting offstage in small clumps so as to be able to enter easily through audience. General approach – watch each speaker in turn. React as appropriate but don't overdo it vocally – a smile or look of worry will do.

TONY (*Intro*): A few years ago, Wimborne Community Theatre asked local people, children and adults, for their thoughts about living close to our local rivers. They told us about the importance of rivers, either as memories or how they are part of their on-going everyday lives. We would like to give you a brief flavour of them:

SFX SOUNDSCAPE OF RIVER ALLEN begins playing

After 4 seconds, led by SUE, HEATHER, STEWART, & GILL cast enter in pairs or threes, singing first verse of the 'River is Flowing' song: (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OPfXQIYMU5U>)

*The River is flowing
Flowing and growing
The river is flowing
Down to the sea.*

SFX When all in position, River sounds volume lowered but continue throughout text following:

FIRST SPEAKERS SUE, HEATHER, STEWART, & GILL stand at front, facing two microphones. HEATHER/GILL – rt mic; SUE/STEW left. Others bunched behind

SUE B: (*left mic, STEWART has arm round her, or holds her hand*) When you grow up in a landscape with a river, the water seems to wend its way through your memories like lines curving over the contours of a map.

HEATHER: *right mic* My childhood memories are filled with frames in which the river features . . . the cloying muddiness of winter and the heady height of summer. . . the river as an ever-present force of nature.

STEWART: At end of the day, which was always hot, the children would rush to bathe in the river, a fitting end to a balmy summer's day. (*SUE B nods in agreement. They walk to back slowly, arm in arm – or holding hands!*)

GILL (*right mic*): 'As a teenager I often sat under the viaduct enjoying the peace and tranquillity that the river gave. . . On one occasion when the Stour flooded, I went to the bottom of the road to see how far it had come up. Mr. Newman rowed past, up Poole Road itself, shouting at me to:

JEFF: (*slow but strong through old-fashioned loud hailer, if we can get one*) **G-O- H-O-M-E!**

GILL: because the river was still rising and it was getting dangerous.

BARBARA (*taking left-side microphone, vacated by SUE/STEW*): 'I remember one Sunday evening in May in the early 'seventies, at Eye Bridge. I'm sitting on a blanket on the riverbank, the red sun slowly disappearing behind the trees. I hear ripples as the river flows over the shallows, and midges hover over the reeds, and I almost hear the wing beats of a dragonfly looking for somewhere to lay its eggs.

(*During this CLARE takes right side microphone, ready for*)

CLARE (*at right*): 'My gran said the river in the town . . . was called

SUE S (*adopting strong determined pose nearer CLARE than BARBARA*): 'The River Wym'

CLARE: She was adamant about this and got very cross if we called it 'The River Allen'

SUE S: Wym – **Wimborne!** (*moves off sharply, beckoning CLARE to follow*)

JEFF: Whilst playing alongside the Stour some 70 years ago, we used to find Swans, Ducks, Moorhens, Coots, Water Voles, Otters (which were hunted in those days), Grass Snakes (which can swim, by the way), Frogs, Herons and all sorts of river fish. There were also many more rabbits and occasional hares to see in the riverside fields then. The odd Tawny Owl would also prowl up and down the riverside in the dusk, looking for something to pounce on.'

JANE: 'I remember the hours I'd spend with my friend in the river - her garden links on to the river so I went there all the time in the summer. Her dad built us a swing over the river for us to jump off,

we would catch slow worms and name them, most of the time we would get her kayak and catch fish for hours. We would play in the water until we couldn't feel our limbs after we would eat our dinner next to the river with the slow worms in the giant enclosure we built for them. When it was time for me to go, we would release the worms back where we found them.'

CLARE (*at right mic, joined by SAFFY & EVA*): 'The soothing sound of the water against the rocks gives me a feeling like someone saying, "I am here for you. You have nothing to worry about." The birds tweeting sing-songs to me as if I was their Queen. The children laughing and screaming show me it's a small world of happiness. (*Passes right side mic to SAFFY, encouraging her. Then steps back into clump of actors*)

(*STEWART moves to take left side mic. during next exchange*)

SAFFY (*coming forwards, holding right hand side microphone, but moving to centre*): It was a hot summer's day, but one of the saddest for me and my family. It was my Grandad's funeral and my mind was full of emotions as I went for a walk with my Brother, Mum, Dad and my Nan. Hearing and seeing the birds chirp in harmony reminded me of Grandad - birds were his favourite animal and.... it really felt like he was there with us. Walking around the Stour made me happier and want to talk a lot more. Seeing the families having their picnics and people paddling or, Kayaking. . . but the funniest was people jumping and swinging into the river. My family and I smiled with joy.

(*Short Pause for River sound FX. SAFFY passes mic to EVA*)

EVA (*at right hand side microphone, facing audience*) "Don't go, Dad!"

STEWART (*across stage, at left hand side mic, facing audience*) "I have to. The Army needs me,"

EVA:-I wished, wished, wished Dad didn't have to join the Army. He'd changed since he joined up. Mum said he was finally acting like the man he was born to be, but to me he was almost a stranger. His hair was trimmed into a buzz cut and he'd grown a moustache. It could have been any old dad in front of me, not mine at all. But he WAS my dad. "Oh Dad, I'm going to miss you so much!"

STEW: It's ok, I'll only be away for four months"

EVA: FOUR MONTHS?!

STEW: "Blimey, I didn't say Four Years!"

EVA (*moving forward a little towards audience*): We had walked to the white bridge over the river Allen, and there were tons of people bustling past us. Neither of us cared. Everyone walked straight past us, so it was like we were in our own personal bubble. I could hear laughter and that

trickly water noise, and the sun shone through the trees. Everything looked so amazing and everyone looked so happy. But my heart was breaking, breaking.

(SFX louder. CAST look a little sad, after EVA's story, then hum tune of 'The Rivers are flowing' as they move slowly, rhythmically, fluidly about to take up new positions, with next speakers coming to the front – SUE S – on left with GILL & JANE; HEATHER on right with JEFF & SUE B)

SUE S: Humidity hangs in the air
as I drag my feet out of the school door once more
leaving behind the stress that piles on my shoulders

HEATHER: I take a breath
Pushing my previous thoughts to the back of my mind
And securing a plait in my loosely curled hair
Grateful for the refreshing breeze on my neck

GILL: My hands grip gently to the trunk of a willow tree
Which leans over into the water
Breaking its surface and sending cascades of green downwards

JEFF: I balance among the branches
Observing shimmers of sunlight reflect
the scales of each fish that glides by
Weaving in and out of the reeds

JANE: A smile of the purest joy spreads across my face
This river truly is the pinnacle of serenity
And it is the only thing I have on my mind

SUE B: I sling my school bag onto my back
Abandoning my worries
as the river's current sweeps them away,
never to be thought of again.

(BARBARA comes forward, gets mic from right from JEFF, then slowly carefully moves forward to centre – everyone clumps in and stand just behind her, looking forward, as if at the Otters. HEATHER moves to left side mic)

BARBARA: One Christmas morning walking by the Stour with my son and daughter. she stopped dead and held her hand up and whispered, "Otters!" We crept forward and there were two sitting on the bank and, just for a minute, they were unaware of us before scuttling off the bank and sliding into the river. We watched them dip below the surface their sleek heads rose again as they cut through the water at speed to get away from us,'

(During HEATHER's speech, STEW & SUE B to mic at right. CLARE to right side mic)

HEATHER (*in quickly*): 'A fish with a flash of silver splashes into the water after catching a midge that flew too close to the surface. I lie back, and far above, a bird spirals in the warm air rising from the land.

SUE B (*right hand mic in quickly*): I close my eyes and hear a sound that will always be, for me, Wimborne. The bells of the Minster, calling the faithful to prayer, followed by the single bell of the Catholic Church and, in the very distance, St John's.

STEW (*same right hand mic*): if there was one piece of advice I would wish to pass on to the people of Wimborne it would be this: just once in a while, take out your ear pieces and listen to the sounds and savour the smells.

(*SUE S to right hand mic*)

CLARE: Who knows? You may hear the beat of dragonfly wings.'

SUE S: And so, the river continues to flow its way through our lives, memories and imaginations. The herons, the ducks, the anglers, the bridges – so much remains unchanged. And still, generations of young eyes, drifting their distracted gaze away from classes, and out of windows quietly watching the water, softly urging it to sail them away on its enchanting current...

ALL (whispering): To the beat of dragonfly wings....

All exit, in spirals, not straight lines, singing softly both verses of song

*The river is flowing
Flowing and growing
The river is flowing
Down to the sea*

*V2 'Mother Earth carry me
Your child I will always be
Mother Earth carry me Down to the sea.'*

SFX RIVER FLOWING CUT

TONY: Thank you for watching. If you want to read more stories about our rivers, check out our website – www.wimbornecommunitytheatre.co.uk - and if you'd like to get involved in our next production 'Home' you can.... come and have a chat – or take a postcard.